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## **MARK ROWE PLEADS GUILTY TO DEFRAUDING BOSSIER PARISH SCHOOL BOARD**

**Shreveport, Louisiana:** Mark Edward Rowe, 41, of Plain Dealing, La., employed by the Bossier Parish School Board in the maintenance department and one of five defendants indicted last month for defrauding the Bossier Parish School Board in connection with the purchase and maintenance of air conditioning systems, has pleaded guilty to one count of mail fraud, United States Attorney Donald W. Washington announced today. The guilty plea was entered before United States District Judge S. Maurice Hicks, Jr. Sentencing is set for May 20, 2009.

Co-defendants Alan Victor Lee and Garrett Gene Wilson, co-owners of Ark-La-Tex Air Repair, Inc., have pleaded guilty to one count of mail fraud each and will be sentenced May 14 and 20, 2009. Ark-La-Tex Air Repair, Inc. pleaded guilty to conspiracy to commit mail fraud. The corporation itself was named in last month's indictment and the corporation's guilty plea will facilitate the forfeiture of corporate assets that are proceeds of the crime.

Ark-La-Tex Repair, Inc. received approximately \$8.6 million worth of air conditioning contracts from the School Board between 2004 and 2008. During this same time, Rowe admitted that he falsely certified that the proper equipment was in place and failed to conduct proper inspections. Rowe also admitted that he approved invoices for payment when he knew that the invoices contained false information and that Air Repair did not perform the work listed on the invoices. In return, Wilson and Lee provided Rowe and others with cash and other things of value.

Wilson and Lee admitted that they and the company charged the School Board for more expensive equipment than was actually installed, charged for equipment that was never installed at all, and charged for replacing air conditioning units that were functioning properly. Wilson and Lee also admitted that their co-defendants who were School Board employees were allowed to swipe their maintenance department credit cards at Air Repair to receive cash, with bogus invoices subsequently generated to cover up the fraud. As a result of the scheme charged in the indictment, the School Board was defrauded in excess of \$780,000.

Rowe faces a maximum penalty of 20 years in prison, a \$250,000 fine, or both. Sentencing in federal court is determined by the discretion of federal judges and the governing statute. Parole has been abolished in the federal system.

A six-month investigation by the FBI code-named "Screaming Eagle" led to the indictment which remains pending against the three co-defendants.

This investigation was conducted by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Shreveport Resident Agency, with the assistance of the Bossier Parish Sheriff's Office. The case is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorneys Alexander C. Van Hook and Robin S. McCoy.

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